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# *Wild Swans* by Elena Kats-Chernin: The Journey From the Australian Ballet to the UK Dance Charts

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**Abstract:** In 2003 composer Elena Kats-Chernin collaborated with choreographer Meryl Tankard to produce *Wild Swans*, a ballet based upon the theme of Hans Christian Anderson's enduring tale evoking the sufferings of Eliza's fate to save her brothers from the evil curse of their stepmother. It resulted in a score rich with a wide range of musical sources underscoring a tableaux of dance and images beautifully evocative of the tale. The work was premiered by the Australian Ballet at the Sydney Opera House on 29 April 2003. This paper looks at the unexpected journey that one of the musical movements from the work entitled "Eliza Aria" undertook as a consequence of the information communication technology revolution in the early twenty-first century and web 2.0 potential for user generated content. Following the use of the aria for a commercial TV advertisement for Lloyds Trustee Savings Bank (TSB) the aria went viral on You Tube, was transformed into a telephone ringtone, underwent amateur and professional remix and became a hit on the classical, dance and pop charts.

## Introduction

On the background to her collaboration with Tankard, Kats-Chernin states that her initial interest in the choreographer dates back to 1985. Upon seeing Tankard's work, she approached the choreographer in writing. Later Tankard, upon hearing Kats Chernin's work at a Musica Viva concert agreed to an initial collaboration that did not result in anything. Their first opportunity to a meaningful collaboration was a major commission for the Sydney Olympics 2000 opening segment *Deep Sea Dreaming*. In her composer's program note for *Wild Swans*, Kats-Chernin states:

From our first collaboration on the *Deep Sea Dreaming* segment of the Olympics Opening Ceremony in 2000, it was clear that Meryl Tankard and I had a rare level of mutual understanding and were very interested in working together again.<sup>1</sup>

The collaboration was an extensive process which has been documented by Potter.<sup>2</sup> *Wild Swans* was filmed by ABC Television in 2003 and a documentary, "*Wild Swans*": *Behind the Scenes*, was also made in the same year.

For the *Wild Swans* score Kats-Chernin drew on a wide range of influences, from the dissonant chords of the soundtracks to the old black-and white Russian films, to Hungarian folk songs and operettas, and even a small sample from one of her old piano concertos. The score features prominent parts for soprano soloist; percussion, in particular the xylophone; and alto saxophone. In her program note she states:

Being Russian born I have a strong connection to the ballet scores of Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Stravinsky and as a result in the *Wild Swans*, more than any other work of mine, I have allowed myself the freedom to roam through 200 years of musical genres, ranging from Hungarian Operetta through to folk music and even including the influences of jazz and popular music.<sup>3</sup>

This technique of drawing upon past musical styles is a common feature of Kats-Chernin's music which I have addressed in my earlier research.<sup>4</sup> Her music has been attributed stylistic post-modern associations in the vein of Alfred Schnittke and Rodion Shchedrin and as a composer she does not shy from drawing from a range of stylistic sources as well as recycling her own music.

Despite being a work for dancers and orchestra it was decided that a soprano be added singing a wordless part. In her program note she states:

Early on, Meryl and I agreed that we definitely would like to add a soprano to the orchestra who would represent the princess Eliza and add a slightly magical quality to the sound of the orchestra. The soprano became a character on stage in the role of the good fairy. The sequences with the soprano are amongst those that I feel the most attached to, and have helped give the ballet score an unusual and unique sound.<sup>5</sup>

This was the genesis of "Eliza Aria" which went on to become the musical hit of the work. The piece took on a life of its own which outlasted the season and interest in original ballet. The ballet itself received mixed reviews with the *Sydney Morning Herald's* critic being equivocal on the choreography, but quite enamoured of the musical and design aspects of the production stating:

Using the expansive, fluent language of contemporary dance—and making up for the pointe work she hasn't had much chance to use for years—Tankard has adopted an arm's-length storytelling approach in which events unfold without arousing strong drama or emotion.<sup>6</sup>

The review of the Melbourne season of the ballet is somewhat more negative critiquing the choreography for a formless approach with a lack of character definition.<sup>7</sup> However, ballet commentator's such as Potter have championed the work and lobbied for a revival bemoaning the independent success of the music which has become divorced from its origins.<sup>8</sup>

On the Australia Music Centre's website, Kats-Chernin is only too happy to acknowledge the origin of the aria and its ultimate manifestations:

I wrote the piece firstly as part of the ballet *Wild Swans* choreographed by Meryl Tankard for [the] Australian Ballet. Originally it was for soprano and orchestra and had its premiere in 2003. The piece introduces princess Eliza and expresses her pure soul, innocence and faith in the good of the world. The piece is light in texture and uses very simple harmonies (it starts with just three chords A minor-C major-F major).

Since then I transcribed it for piano solo, as well as for string quartet, clarinet quartet, violin and piano, clarinet and piano, flute and piano, etc ... Due to the use of the original version in a TV advertisement in [the] UK, it became well known there and has since been remixed by Mark Brown as well as other DJs, as well as made into a pop song (called "The Journey Continues" sung by Sarah Cracknell).<sup>9</sup>

Early on Kats-Chernin arranged a twelve movement concert suite from the ballet score. This was recorded by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra under Ola Rudner with soprano Jane Sheldon in 2004 and released on the ABC Classics label along with the composer's *Piano Concerto* and *Mythic*.<sup>10</sup>

The “Eliza Aria” was chosen for use in a series of advertisements on television and cinema for the British bank Lloyds TSB, under the tagline “For the Journey.” The campaign was launched in January 2007.<sup>11</sup> They follow the fortunes of a couple who meet on a futuristic-looking train, called the Black Horse (after Lloyds’ logo), through to their retirement.<sup>12</sup> Following the initial minute-long advertisement, further thirty second instalments were aired, each advertising a different financial product. The touching animations combined with Kats-Chernin’s music caught the public’s imagination, and brought the music to attention in the United Kingdom and further afield.

Lloyds TSB were inundated with enquiries about the music behind the advertisement which led to Lloyds TSB offering its customers 10,000 free ringtones and 10,000 free downloads of the piece. “For the Journey” has been viewed more than 750,000 times on websites including YouTube and Kontraband. The track became available as a download from iTunes.

A performance of Kats-Chernin playing the piano herself, along with versions by various other musicians, which were uploaded to YouTube have elicited scores of comments from subscribers. Kats-Chernin’s *Wild Swans* concert suite, containing a version of “Eliza Aria” for voice and orchestra, was reissued in 2007 by Australian Broadcasting Commission with a new cover illustration from the Lloyds TSB advertisement and sales skyrocketed.<sup>13</sup>

Amateur remixes of “Eliza Aria” have since appeared on websites like YouTube. A remix was commercially released in February 2008. It was entitled “The Journey Continues” and was produced by DJ Mark Brown, featuring Sarah Cracknell from the UK band Sainte Etienne. “The Journey Continues” reached the top of the UK dance charts and reached No. 11 in the overall pop charts.<sup>14</sup> The video is notable for its use of thousands of still photographs played in sequence to produce a surreal animation.

## Discussion

The viral distribution of “Eliza Aria” through its early adoption in a UK television advertisement resulted in an audience for Kats-Chernin’s music on an unprecedented scale. Her publishers Boosey and Hawkes were responsible for pitching the music to Lloyd’s Bank Travel Service without her intervention, or her input into the advertisement. It is possible that they sourced the work from the Boosey and Hawkes website where samples of the music are provided.<sup>15</sup> However, she was consulted in the process and was not unhappy with the visual representation by the advertising agency.<sup>16</sup>

However, the most gratifying aspect of the advertisements was the exposure up of her music to a whole new audience. She states:

I have a wholly positive reaction to hearing my music in these adverts; it’s a great pleasure for a composer’s music to be given a second chance! The animation artwork in the adverts is masterly and clever, and the way it fits with the music is incredibly thoughtful. The stories are very cute and charming and one just *has* to love them. It has made my music known to a whole new audience. Viewer’s reactions after viewing the YouTube video took me by utter surprise—it was just amazing to see that so many people were making really generous comments. And now that even pop and disco versions of “Eliza’s Aria” have been released, I’m experiencing another completely new sensation. I feel like I’m entering a world that was closed to me previously.<sup>17</sup>

Kats-Chernin set up a Myspace page to promote her works.<sup>18</sup> At the time it opened playing “Eliza Aria,” the Mark Brown remix and the Lloyds advertisement. The site provided another opportunity to network with a diverse community friends. Nowadays, however, Myspace has been replaced by other social media platforms and musicians and composers have largely migrated away from this platform.

So how does the composer profit from all this success? Has the composer profited appropriately for the use of their creative and intellectual property in the Lloyds advertisement series, ringtone downloads, re-issue of concert suite recording and subsequent re-mix of “Eliza Aria”? According to the composer it was all a bit of a mystery in the world of synchronisation rights fees, recoup of costs from recordings, iTunes sales, random catch playlists and agent’s contract. However, she was happy that some royalties did flow in her direction and it did not hurt her bank account.<sup>19</sup>

This journey provides a case study about the impact of the information and communication technologies (ICT) on traditional musical composition and presentation.<sup>20</sup> The debate surrounding the influence of ICT on the commodification of music continues in the context of the social process and meaning of ICT for creators and users.<sup>21</sup> The potential economic impact of the internet and digital technology on music and its dissemination is also of significance for future artistic policy and practice.<sup>22</sup> The threat to the music industry early on was the Napster phenomenon of distributing music free on the internet causing panic in the music industry. The merger of AOL America On Line and Time-Warner in 2000 was a response to the realisation that the internet was becoming big business. The consequence of the culture of multimedia and real-virtuality is that they capture the utter diversity of most cultural expressions and put an end to separation and classification of different cultural fields, categorisations and genres defying the conventional logic of media and marketing. The immensity of cultural consumption and creation that occurs daily on web based platforms including blogs, vlogs, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and Myspace indicates that cultural information is flowing in great volumes.

One of outcomes of the ICT revolution is the *culture of remixability* which the principles of new media and the network society’s self-expanding processing and digital recombinations have generated.<sup>23</sup> This remixable culture is a direct consequence of this kind of interactive, digital cultural landscape where user-friendly software makes it extremely easy to appropriate, or *remix*, a given new media object, such as digital photos, digital films or digital soundtracks. Such systemic reworking of a source clashes in many instances with copyright legislation and authorship, the ethics of which has been discussed by this author in earlier research.<sup>24</sup> However, as some commentators point out, new media industries and digital cultures promote new relationships between producers and consumers, which inevitably lead to various re-definitions in the field of copyright and authorship. These *interactive* and *participatory* aspects of new media objects further erode the distinction between artists and audience and offer a model which has been termed the rise of the *prosumer*—in other words the *consumer* is also a *producer*.<sup>25</sup> The consumer has, of course, always been a producer since they inevitably gives their own meaning to a work, but the actual material manifestation of interactive manipulation has been greatly accelerated in digital culture. According to Anders Fagerjord:

On the Web, each of these characteristics, each of the variables in this equation, may be mixed into a new genre in remix culture. For example: moving image + address to camera + documentary footage + recorded broadcast + irregular schedule + many

short segments available for selection by user + written comments by viewers = video blog.<sup>26</sup>

This case study demonstrate that ICTs can lead to a breakdown of the conventional approaches to marketing of classical music. The case study represents an example of viral video marketing which is now commonplace, but at the time was revolutionised by campaigns such as Cadbury's Drumming Gorilla or Tay Zonday's "Chocolate Rain." Viral marketing represents a very broad church, commonly used to describe any marketing initiative (predominantly but not exclusively digital) designed to encourage our innate desire to share the things we find appealing; for the benefit and enjoyment of others, and to express something about ourselves as propagators—in other words the *buzz that passes from person to person*. Successful viral marketing campaigns can therefore create widely distributed and frequently transformed community distributed or propagated or prosumer content.

As early as 2001 David Throsby in *Economics and Culture* predicted:

The advent of the internet as a locus for arts consumption, and of the broader digital economy as a principal domain of cultural interchange, is likely also to have significant effects on many aspects of structure, conduct and performance in the arts industry in the future.<sup>27</sup>

But could he have predicted that Australian contemporary serious ballet music would become a commercial dance hit, ring tone with viral prosumers regularly adding new versions to the mix resulting in international exposure of the music to an audience of millions?

Within the context of viral marketing, the impact of this particular journey upon the career of the composer Elena Kats-Chernin has been quite phenomenal. The outcomes of this commercial exposure for the artist in terms of synchronisation fees, royalties from radio play and Random count "catch" playlists; all consequences of the original composition for a classical ballet. The original score could also be seen as a victim of the impact of new technologies in its many different forms. The engagement with the music has been much wider than its original intent through digitisation, remix and the participatory culture of the internet. Its first incarnation as the ballet score purely an accompaniment to a ballet performance was provided with the potential for increased audiences through the original ABC recording of the work, which largely languished on the shelves of the ABC Shops. This was the traditional approach to marketing classical music which prior to digitisation of music involved people in wealthier parts of the world buying recordings of music on vinyl, cassette and later CD's to play on electronic devices such as record players, cassette players, CD players, Sony Discman and Walkman in their homes, cars or walking about. Hesmondhalgh and Meier argue that capitalistic imperatives of the IT industry created the shift away from the consumer electronics approach to consuming music.<sup>28</sup> The adoption of the theme from the "Eliza Aria" by Lloyds bank TSB for the advertising campaign provided another opportunity for the music from the ballet to be heard by a wider audience again to the extent that it became so widely popular that free ringtone downloads of the "Eliza Aria" were available on their website. Personalised ringtones were a fad and a briefly thriving global industry of the early twenty-first century and the "Eliza Aria" became a random victim of the success of this commercial phenomena. The subsequent re-release of the ABC recording utilising the images from the Lloyds TSB advertising campaign saw a return to the traditional approach to marketing the music to the consumer demographic that is generally associated with contemporary composition. This time the message had reached this market and resulted in sales success for the recorded version. The composer also joined the digital marketing space in setting up her MySpace website and capitalising on the success of the "Eliza Aria." Meanwhile another unpredicted trajectory occurred with the growth of the remix or

participatory culture which projected the “Eliza Aria” into the pop and dance charts and into the hands of YouTube remix vlogosphere.

All of these calculated and accidental occurrences contributed to the increased exposure of the music of Elena Kats-Chernin. It is highly doubtful that the “Eliza Aria” would have been heard internationally by millions of people had it not been the arrival of the digital revolution in music. It might be speculated that the original ABC recording of the work would have made its way into the homes of traditional consumers of classical contemporary music, but the phenomenal success of the work in the digital space was unprecedented for the composer. However, the commercial potential of the digital economy has been difficult to measure as copyright law attempts to catch up with the digital streaming revolution. The composer has been unable to measure exactly how the financial dealings surrounding the “Eliza Aria” have been fairly distributed, but she admits that it has not hurt her financially or reputationally.

## Endnotes

All URLs accessed Sept 2018.

- <sup>1</sup> Elena Kats-Chernin, “Wild Swans Ballet,” in various, *The Australian Ballet Presents “Wild Swans,”* program (Sydney: Playbill, 2003).
- <sup>2</sup> Michelle Potter, “Wild Swans and the Art of Collaboration,” *Brolga*, 18 (2003): 26–31, “Meryl Tankard’s *Wild Swans*” (23 June 2017), in Michelle Potter, *Michelle Potter on Dancing* <http://michellepotter.org/articles/meryl-tankards-wild-swans>.
- <sup>3</sup> Kats-Chernin, “Wild Swans Ballet.”
- <sup>4</sup> Helen Rusak, “Life as a Cabaret,” *RealTime* (August-September 2005): 52, “Matricide and the Female Divine,” *Australasian Drama Studies*, 45 (2004): 43-71, “Mr Barbecue by Elena Kats-Chernin: The Cooked and the Raw,” *Journal of Music Research Online*, 5 (2014): <http://www.jmro.org.au/index.php/mca2/article/view/75>.
- <sup>5</sup> Kats-Chernin, “Wild Swans Ballet.”
- <sup>6</sup> Jill Sykes, “Wild Swans,” *Sydney Morning Herald* (5 May 2003): <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/wild-swans-20030505-gdgpj5.html>
- <sup>7</sup> Hilary Crampton, “Formless Ideas Fall a Bit Flat,” *The Age* (10 June 2003): <https://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/06/09/10550109207>.
- <sup>8</sup> Potter.
- <sup>9</sup> Elena Kats-Chernin, “Eliza Aria,” from *Wild Swans* (2002), score and notes reproduced on <https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/work/kats-chernin-elena-eliza-aria>.
- <sup>10</sup> Elena Kats-Chernin with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, *Wild Swans*, CD / audio recording (Canberra: ABC Classics, 2005).
- <sup>11</sup> Marc Craste, dir., *For the Journey* (London: Studio AKA with RKCR/YandR, 2011), reproduced on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3xe9dSY7zM&list=PL-gg564EyxI0mLVSIkqSR0bENSsFup6Zk>; Duncan Macleod, “Lloyds TSB London 2012 *For The Journey*,” *Inspiration Room* (12 July 2011), <http://theinspirationroom.com/daily/2011/lloyds-tsb-london-2012-for-the-journey/>.
- <sup>12</sup> The advertisements were created by agency Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe Y and R, and feature animation by Studio AKA.
- <sup>13</sup> Elena Kats-Chernin, *Wild Swans*, CD (Canberra: ABC Classics, 2007).
- <sup>14</sup> DJ Mark Brown with Sarah Cracknell, “The Journey Continues,” single (NY: Nervous Records, 2008), alternate mixes appear on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS8vYg7Z-IM> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbnPQh2bNKo>.
- <sup>15</sup> See [http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample\\_detail/Elena-Kats-Chernin-Eliza-Aria-soprano-orchestra/101309](http://www.boosey.com/cr/sample_detail/Elena-Kats-Chernin-Eliza-Aria-soprano-orchestra/101309)
- <sup>16</sup> This was reported in the now defunct *Northphase* magazine (3 April 2007), formerly at <http://www.thenorthphase.com/1.0/elenaKats-interview.html>. Unfortunately the URL has lapsed so further details are no longer available.
- <sup>17</sup> Anon. / *Quarter Notes*, “Elena Kats-Chernin: Interview With a Cosmopolitan Composer,” *Quarter Notes* (Nov 2007): 2, reproduced on <http://www.boosey.com/licensing/news/Elena-Kats-Chernin-interview-with-a-cosmopolitan-composer/11504>.
- <sup>18</sup> See <https://myspace.com/elenakatschernin>.
- <sup>19</sup> Email communication with author (16 September 2008).

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- <sup>20</sup> Robert Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2017).
- <sup>21</sup> Henry Jenkins, "Rethinking 'Rethinking Convergence/Culture,'" *Cultural Studies*, 28.2 (2014): 267–97; Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand* (London: Random House, 2006); Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), *The Power of Identity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), "Communication Power: Mass Communication, Mass Self-Communication, and Power Relationships in the Network Society," *Media and Society* (2010): 3–17, and *End of Millennium* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).
- <sup>22</sup> Jim McGuigan, "From Cultural Populism to Cool Capitalism," *Art and the Public Sphere*, 1.1 (2011): 7–18 and *Culture and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 2012); David Throsby, *The Economics of Cultural Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- <sup>23</sup> Lev Manovich, "The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life," *Critical Inquiry*, 35.2 (2009): 319–331; Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008), *Code: Version 2.0* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).
- <sup>24</sup> Helen Rusak and Stephen McKenzie, "YouTube as a Nascent Practice," in Howard Haris et al, eds, *The Heart of the Good Institution* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), pp 111–126.
- <sup>25</sup> Felix Stalder, *Manuel Castells: The Theory of the Network Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).
- <sup>26</sup> Anders Fagerjord, "After Convergence: Youtube and Remix Culture," in Jeremy Hunsinger et al, eds, *International Handbook of Internet Research* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), pp. 187–200.
- <sup>27</sup> David Throsby, *Economics and Culture* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 119.
- <sup>28</sup> David Hesmondhalgh and Leslie Meier, "What the Digitalisation of Music Tells Us About Capitalism," *Information, Communication and Society*, 21:11 (2018): 1555–1570.